

Abstract 426

TITLE: Needle Availability

AUTHOR: Blutch, D

ISSUE: In Louisiana, approximately one-third of AIDS cases in males and two-thirds of AIDS cases in females are directly or indirectly related to drug use. Fifty percent of injection drug users in Louisiana used a needle after someone else used it when shooting drugs. However, despite state laws that allow the purchase of syringes from pharmacies, injection drug users have limited access to clean injection equipment.

SETTING: Target areas where injection drug users have been identified as living or associating within.

PROJECT: To provide a multi-faceted intervention for persons who engage in injection drug use, the Office of Public Health designed a program utilizing pharmacies in identified high-risk areas. As an enhancement to street outreach, community-based organizations distribute needle coupons from participating pharmacies. With a coupon an individual can buy new, sterile needles at a significantly reduced price. This project serves as a model of service delivery and community awareness linking HIV/AIDS prevention and harm reduction. The structure of the intervention strategy provides the organization with a secure ground to assist clients where they are.

RESULTS: The intervention is being conducted by four community-based organizations in both urban and rural areas. There are five pharmacies involved in the program. In 1998, 1,200 coupons were distributed. Thirty-four of these were redeemed at participating pharmacies for a total of 305 sterile needles. Additionally, pharmacies reported that needles were sold to individuals who were aware of the program but did not possess a coupon.

LESSONS LEARNED: Privately owned community pharmacies are willing to become partners in harm reduction interventions. When provided with resources, the injection drug use community can be motivated to embrace harm reduction techniques. This type of intervention is easily implemented where it does not conflict with state or federal legislation regarding access to sterile needles.

PRESENTER CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Dimitre Blutch

Address: 234 Loyola Avenue, 5th Floor
New Orleans, Louisiana 70112

Telephone: (504) 568-7474

Fax: (504) 568-7044

E-mail: dblutch@dhhmail.dhh.state.la.us